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PRESIDENT LINCOLN AND THE NAVY

FROM March 4, 1861, to April 15, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was the commander-in-chief of the navy of the United States. During these years the duties of this office were more important, varied and difficult than at any other period of the history of our nation. Early in the Civil War the task of administering the navy was suddenly augmented and complicated by a large increase in the number of ships, officers and seamen, by far-reaching changes in the art of naval construction, and by the employment of the fleet in actual warfare. From 1861 to 1865 the naval ships increased from 90 to 670, the officers from 1300 to 6700, and the seamen from 7500 to 51,500. Some two hundred vessels were built either at the navy-yards by the government or at private shipyards under contract, and more than three hundred vessels were purchased. The net annual expenditures of the navy rose from \$12,000,000 to \$123,000,000.¹

During the Civil War naval architecture was in a state of transition. Iron was superseding wood as a material of construction, and steam engines were taking the place of sails as a means of propulsion. When the war began more than one-half of our naval vessels were sailing-ships; when it ended four-fifths of them were steamships. Many of the latter were ironclads, the modern type of war-vessel, now first introduced into our navy. Of the ironclads, not a few were monitors, the well-known invention of that distinguished engineer and naval architect, John Ericsson. The construction of naval machinery and of ordnance was rapidly improved. Nearly every variety and type of engine, valve-gear, screw-propeller and boiler were tried. A chief engineer was sent to Europe to collect information relating to steam engineering. The various kinds of coal in the seaboard states were experimented with in order to ascertain their comparative value for naval vessels. New cannon of different kinds were introduced, the largest of which were the 15-inch guns brought into use by Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox. These numerous changes in the art of naval construction greatly increased the difficulties of administration.²

¹ *Senate Ex. Doc.*, 45 Cong., 1 sess., no. 3, pp. 156-157; *House Ex. Doc.*, 40 Cong., 2 sess., no. 280; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy*, for 1864, pp. xii-xxiv; for 1865, pp. xii-xiii; *Navy Registers*, for 1860, pp. 18-81; for 1865, pp. 12-216.

² *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy*, for 1864, p. xxix.

The naval operations of the Civil War were the most extensive ever undertaken by our navy. A blockade of the Southern States was successfully enforced, many important naval expeditions were projected and executed, numerous rivers of the South and West were actively patrolled, and the commerce-destroyers of the enemy were tracked over distant seas. At the beginning of the war the blockading of the extensive coast of the Confederacy was deemed impossible by many men both at home and abroad. To their surprise this difficult undertaking was soon accomplished. The length of the coast blockaded, measured from Alexandria, Virginia, to the Rio Grande, was 3549 miles. One hundred and eighty-nine harbors, openings to rivers, or indentations of the coast were guarded. On the Mississippi and its tributaries the gunboats traversed and patrolled 3615 miles; and on the sounds, bayous, rivers and inlets of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, about 2000 miles.³ Next in importance to the blockade, were the naval operations against the batteries, forts and fortified towns and cities on the sea-coast and rivers of the Confederacy. As examples of this class of operations, it is sufficient to mention the memorable achievements of Farragut at New Orleans, Vicksburg and Mobile, of Porter at Fort Fisher, and of Dupont and of Dahlgren at Charleston. The most important event of the war in connection with the Confederate commerce-destroyers was of course the capture of the *Alabama* by the *Kearsarge*, off Cherbourg, in June, 1864.

President Lincoln has briefly described the work of the navy in a letter written on August 26, 1863, in response to an invitation to attend a mass-meeting of "unconditional Union men", to be held at Springfield, Illinois, the President's home-town. Having referred to the achievements of the army at Antietam, Murfreesboro and Gettysburg, and on fields of lesser note, he paid his respects to its sister-service:

Nor must Uncle Sam's web-feet be forgotten. At all the watery margins they have been present. Not only on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river, but also up the narrow, muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have been and made their tracks. Thanks to all.⁴

The immediate representatives of the President in naval affairs were the two leading officials of the Navy Department, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox. These two men, with the assistance of their bureau chiefs, largely conducted the naval business of the war.

³ *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, for 1863*, p. iii.

⁴ Nicolay and Hay, *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln* (Gettysburg ed.), IX. 101.

Their relations with the President were exceedingly cordial and intimate. They saw him almost daily, visited him at all hours at the White House, and discussed with him the various phases of naval policy and administration. Upon them largely depended the success or failure of the navy. Differing widely in temperament, training and experience, the two men were complementary. Each would have been weak without the other. Together they were a remarkably strong force in conducting the war. So closely were they associated with the President, and so large and predominant a part in naval affairs did they play, that no account of Lincoln and the navy would be complete without some reference to their work and character.

Gideon Welles was descended from the best stock of Connecticut. The original emigrant of his family to that state, Thomas Welles, held many important public offices between 1639 and 1659, being twice elected governor of the infant colony. Gideon was educated at the Episcopal Academy in Cheshire, Connecticut, and at the Norwich University in Vermont. He read law, and at the age of twenty-three became editor and one of the proprietors of the *Hartford Times*, which he edited until 1837. From 1827 to 1835 he was a member of the Connecticut legislature. For several years Welles served his state as comptroller of public accounts, and for some five years he was postmaster of Hartford. From 1846 to 1849 he was chief of the Bureau of Provisions and Clothing in the Navy Department at Washington.

In politics Welles was for many years a Jacksonian Democrat. His anti-slavery views carried him into the Republican party when it was organized, and in 1856 he was its candidate for governor of Connecticut. He was at that time the leading contributor to the *Hartford Evening Press*, the Republican organ of his state. For several years Welles was a member of the Republican National Committee. He was a delegate to the Republican National Conventions of 1856 and 1860, and during the presidential campaign of 1860 he labored earnestly for the election of Lincoln.⁵

In November, 1860, when Lincoln began to consider various men for places in his Cabinet, Welles's name was one of the first presented to him, and was the subject of a special consultation. Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin urged his appointment. Senator John P. Hale, a New Hampshire politician, was rather earnestly pressed upon the President for Secretary of the Navy, and he was somewhat mortified that his pretensions for the place were not more seriously regarded. Other names may have been considered for the naval

⁵ Boynton, *History of the Navy during the Great Rebellion*, I. 22-24.

portfolio. Lincoln from the first was convinced of Welles's fitness, availability and representative character.⁶

The assignment of Welles to the Navy Department instead of to some other Cabinet position may be ascribed to his three years' experience as chief of the Bureau of Provisions and Clothing, and to his residence in New England, whose maritime interests have given her a claim upon the naval secretaryship. In making up his Cabinet, Lincoln apportioned its members according to their sectional residence and their party antecedents. Welles was chosen as the New England member, and as a representative of the Democratic element of the Republican party. The Whig faction of the party was not generally friendly to him. No love was lost between Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy and his Secretary of State, William H. Seward. Thurlow Weed, one of the leaders of the Whigs in New York, was not kindly disposed towards Welles and opposed his selection for the naval secretaryship. In December, 1860, Weed said to the President that if he would on his way to his inauguration in Washington stop long enough in New York, Philadelphia, or Baltimore to select an attractive figure-head from the prow of a ship, would adorn it with an elaborate wig and luxuriant whiskers, and would transfer it to the entrance of the Navy Department, this figure-head would be quite as serviceable to the navy as Welles, and much less expensive. "Oh", Mr. Lincoln replied, "wooden midshipmen answer very well in novels, but we must have a live secretary of the navy."⁷

Welles's "elaborate wig and luxuriant whiskers" gave him a patriarchal appearance, which his age and vigor of intellect belied. When he entered the Cabinet, he was in his fifty-ninth year. Secretary of State Seward and Secretary of War Cameron were older than the Secretary of the Navy, and Attorney-General Bates was ten years his senior. Among the naval officers and seamen Welles's paternal and benevolent aspect won for him the familiar appellation of "Father Welles", or the "Old Man of the Sea". Mr. Charles A. Dana, for a time an assistant of Secretary of War Stanton, has left us one of the best characterizations of Lincoln's naval secretary.

Welles was a curious-looking man: he wore a wig which was parted in the middle, the hair falling down on each side; and it was from his peculiar appearance, I have always thought, that the idea that he was an old fogey originated. I remember Governor Andrew, of Massachusetts, coming into my office at the War Department one day and asking where he could find "that old Mormon deacon, the Secretary of the Navy."

⁶ Papers of Gideon Welles, in the possession of his son Edgar T. Welles, of New York City; Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln*, II. 367.

⁷ Weed, *Autobiography*, I. 606-607, 611.

In spite of his peculiarities, I think Mr. Welles was a very wise, strong man. There was nothing decorative about him; there was no noise in the street when he went along; but he understood his duty, and did it efficiently, continually, and unvaryingly. There was a good deal of opposition to him, for we had no navy when the war began, and he had to create one without much deliberation; but he was patient, laborious, and intelligent at his task.⁸

Welles has sometimes been unjustly regarded as a time-serving and routine-loving executive. It is true that he was not one of those dashing administrators, who reach conclusions by intuition, put their decisions into effect with great strenuousness, and are at once the inspiration and the terror of their subordinates. Rather, he was the quiet, unswerving, fearless executive, who reasons carefully from the evidence presented and draws temperately his conclusions therefrom, who enforces his judgments with firmness and uniformity, and who gains the esteem of his fellows by reason of his patience, integrity and justice. While Welles had his antipathies, he nevertheless administered the navy as a rule with great impartiality. He applied the laws of the navy fearlessly and without favor, no matter what the rank of the offender. He stood, as few secretaries have, for naval discipline and an impartial administration of the naval code. More than once he rebuked a naval court for bringing in a verdict contrary to the evidence presented to it. A court-martial, of which Farragut was president, found the captain of a certain ship guilty of failing to do his utmost in overtaking and capturing a certain Confederate vessel, an offense punishable with death. The court sentenced the offending officer to be suspended from the navy for two years on leave-of-absence pay—a merely nominal penalty. Welles in reviewing these absurd findings pointed out that the sentence of the court would be too mild for a trivial offense, and declared that such punishment as the court had prescribed “no officer could obtain from the Department as a favor”.⁹

No man could be more generous than the Secretary of the Navy in praise of gallant and meritorious conduct. His congratulatory messages to the victorious naval officers were warm and hearty, and felicitously phrased. As a newspaper writer he had acquired considerable facility in composition. All of his writings reveal a faculty for lucid expression, clear thinking, and the discernment of the gist of any subject. His official reports are more interesting reading than are most documents of that sort. Unlike some of the naval secretaries, Welles did not depute to his subordinates the composi-

⁸ Dana, *Recollections of the Civil War*, p. 170.

⁹ *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, first series, vol. III., pp. 467-470.

tion of his annual reports, although he availed himself of their criticisms and suggestions. From the diary which he kept during and after the war, an unpublished document of great historical value, one infers that its author was a methodical man, painstaking and honest, and fearless and coldly precise in estimating the character and ability of his colleagues.¹⁰

In determining the policy of the government, Welles's advice was valued by the President, and his judgment was sober and well-balanced. His counsel, however, may not always have been politic. It is recollected that at the time of the Mason and Slidell episode he wrote a warmly-congratulatory letter to Captain Wilkes. That the Secretary of the Navy should have a profound knowledge of international law, was, however, hardly to be expected. Regarding the government's powers under the Constitution, Welles took a middle ground, being neither a strict nor a broad constructionist. He and the Secretary of State were instinctively opposed to each other, and were usually on opposite sides of the questions that came before the Cabinet. Welles regarded Seward as an intriguing and designing politician. He held, on plausible grounds, that Seward's conduct during the first weeks of Lincoln's administration was, if not traitorous, certainly highly unpatriotic. The Secretary of the Navy possessed none of those superb delusions that sometimes afflicted Lincoln's brilliant Secretary of State. On matters lying within the field of his information his judgment was certainly as reliable as that of his more famous colleague.

To a technical and intimate knowledge of the navy, Welles made no pretensions. He, however, was better equipped than most naval secretaries have been. His three years' service in one of the naval bureaus had given him a considerable acquaintance with the business of the navy and the department. Fortunately, the limitations of Welles's naval knowledge were adequately compensated by the extensive professional information of his Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Gustavus V. Fox, whose selection by President Lincoln as Welles's assistant was a most happy one.

At the beginning of the war Fox was in his fortieth year. He was born in Saugus, Essex County, Massachusetts. His father was a country physician, in moderate circumstances. At the age of sixteen young Fox was appointed a midshipman in the navy, where he remained for eighteen years. During a varied career he saw service in the squadrons of the Mediterranean, the East Indies, the Pacific, the coast of Brazil and the west coast of Africa; and he participated in the naval operations of the Mexican War. For a time he was

¹⁰ Diary of Gideon Welles, in possession of Edgar T. Welles.

attached to the Coast Survey. In 1853 and 1854 he commanded a mail steamer plying between New York and the Isthmus of Panama and belonging to one of the three lines subsidized at that time by the United States government. In July, 1856, having reached the rank of lieutenant, he resigned from the navy and accepted the position of "agent" of the Bay State Woolen Mills, of Lawrence, Massachusetts. Early in 1861, he came to Washington with a plan for the relief of Fort Sumter, and in April President Lincoln permitted him to put it into operation. In planning, promoting and conducting this daring adventure, he displayed such energy and initiative that the President formed a high estimate of his character. The Fort Sumter expedition paved the way to his political preferment. On May 9, 1861, he was appointed chief clerk of the Navy Department, and on July 31 he was promoted to be Assistant Secretary of the Navy, a newly-created position.¹¹

Fox's career both in and out of the navy admirably fitted him for the assistant secretaryship. His long service in the navy gave him a wide acquaintance among the naval officers. He had acquired the habit of the navy and of the sea, and knew well the practice of the naval profession. On the other hand, his experience as a New England manufacturer had familiarized him with the currents of thought and action outside of the navy; with the methods of business, its economies and administration, and the qualities of commercial men. In the science of the naval profession, in contradistinction to its art, Fox was not specially well-grounded. His knowledge of naval architecture was naturally limited, and his strategy proved to be at times faulty. To Rear-Admiral C. H. Davis he appeared more ready to plan, than laboriously to execute. Fox was decisive, quick of mind, and self-confident. No matter how dark and gloomy were the prospects of the North, the buoyancy of his spirits never failed him. Urbane and suave, the amenities of social life came easy to him. His brother-in-law was Lincoln's Postmaster-General, Montgomery Blair. Few men, who in the eventful spring of 1861 came to the surface of that tempestuous political sea at Washington, were so likely as Gustavus V. Fox to survive in its rough waters and ride its waves to preferment and eminence.¹²

Both the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy had a great capacity for work, and each wrote with his own hands a vast number of letters. To their subordinates they often appeared fatigued and overworked. Night after night they toiled over their

¹¹ Biographical details in Boynton, *History of the Navy during the Great Rebellion*, pp. 58-59.

¹² Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln*, V. 4-5; Davis, *Life of Charles Henry Davis*, pp. 132-133.

desks at the department. In the course of his duties Fox now and then visited the navy-yards or some of the principal seaports of the North. Infrequently, Welles or his assistant went to the "front", the latter more often than the former. The Assistant Secretary of the Navy witnessed the fight at Hampton Roads, in March, 1862, between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac*. In May of that year the Secretary of the Navy invited two or three members of the Cabinet, the chief clerk of the department, and several naval officers with the ladies of their families to make a special cruise on the steamer *City of Baltimore* and visit the Union fleets between Washington and Richmond. Such excursions must have brought to the Secretary and his assistant a welcome relief from the anxieties, vexations and arduous toil of their offices.

Throughout the war Lincoln's gaunt form was a familiar figure in the Old Navy Department Building, situated a stone's throw to the westward of the White House. The rooms of Welles and Fox were on the second floor, in easy reach of each other. Here the President often called and chatted in the most informal way. A clerk, who is still living, remembers seeing him appear in the department with "carpet slippers" on his feet. Sometimes he wore a shawl around his shoulders. Of a visit of Lincoln to the department made in April, 1863, Rear-Admiral Dahlgren writes: "The President came into Fox's room while I was there, and sat some time, talking generally of matters. . . . Abe was in good humor, and at leaving said, 'Well I will go home; I had no business here; but as the lawyer said, I had none anywhere else'."¹³

The following entry occurs in the diary of Dahlgren for March 29, 1863:

I went to the Department. Found the President in the Chief Clerk's room with the Secretary and Fox. He looks thin and badly, and is very nervous. Complained of everything. They were doing nothing at Vicksburg or Charleston. Dupont was asking for one iron-clad after another, as fast as they were built. He said the canal at Vicksburg was of no account, and wondered that a sensible man would do it. I tried my hand at consolation, without much avail. He thought the favorable state of public expectation would pass away before anything was done. Then levelled a couple of jokes at the doings at Vicksburg and Charleston. Poor gentleman!¹⁴

Lincoln kept in close touch with the navy. Almost every day, and often several times a day, he consulted with the Secretary, the Assistant Secretary, the officials of the naval bureaus, and the officers holding important commands. Of these, the most frequent visitor at the White House was the Assistant Secretary, to whom fell,

¹³ Dahlgren, *Memoir of John A. Dahlgren*, p. 390.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

among many other duties, that of obtaining from Congress proper naval legislation. Whenever the leading naval officers were in Washington they always called upon the President and found him an eager listener to all that they had to relate about their plans and operations. Chief among the President's naval advisers were Farragut, Porter, Dahlgren, Dupont, Davis, Foote and Wise. In the conferences on naval affairs Lincoln took an active part, and as a result of them he often reached a decision or issued an order. As no minutes of them were kept, it is impossible in most cases to determine precisely what was said or done. The voluminous papers of Welles and Fox, only a small part of which was accessible to me, will doubtless throw some additional light upon the President's achievements in naval administration.

The planning of the naval operations was largely a composite work. Lincoln's share in it was confined for the most part to criticisms and suggestions respecting the plans formulated by others. As to naval movements upon the Mississippi, however, he seems to have had original opinions of his own, derived doubtless from his early experiences as a flatboatman on that river. In the summer of 1861 the Commission of Conference, composed chiefly of naval officers, served as a board of strategy. The commanding officers often originated their own plans, and the Assistant Secretary was always fertile in suggestions respecting naval operations. In all co-operative movements with the army, much consultation took place between the officers of the army and the navy, the officials of the two departments, and the President.

As a rule, the orders to the officers were drafted in the Navy Department and were issued and signed by either Welles or Fox. Sometimes, however, when the need of action was very great, the President himself wrote or dictated orders. For instance, in April, 1863, when Admiral Dupont was operating against Charleston, South Carolina, Lincoln, fearing that the admiral was about to abandon the movement against the city, telegraphed him to hold his position "inside the bar near Charleston".¹⁵ Before the telegram reached him Dupont had withdrawn his ships from the bar. He regarded it as a reflection upon his management of the fleet, and he soon retired from the command of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. It was unusual for the President to interfere in this manner with the work of his officers.

Early in 1862 Commodore Foote, who was then in command of the Mississippi flotilla and had his headquarters at Cairo, Illinois, encountered many difficulties in procuring mortars at Pittsburgh.

¹⁵ *Official Records, first series, vol. XIV., p. 132.*

Much exasperated by the slowness with which the work proceeded, the President ordered Foote to telegraph daily to Captain H. A. Wise, the assistant inspector of naval ordnance at Washington, his progress in obtaining the mortars. For several weeks Wise went to the White House every day, read the telegrams to the President, and received orders for Foote. In this way Lincoln conducted a small part of the business of the navy independent of both Welles and Fox. "With reference to the mortar rafts", Wise wrote to Foote on January 27, 1862, "Uncle Abe, as you already know, has gone into that business with a will, making his first demonstration, *entre nous*, by pitching General Ripley out of his Ordnance Bureau." On January 31 Wise wrote of the President thus, "He is an evidently practical man, understands precisely what he wants, and is not turned aside by anyone when he has his work before him."¹⁶

In selecting officers for the higher commands Lincoln generally followed the advice of the department. Admiral Porter, however, was of the opinion that the President selected him to command the Mississippi squadron, in opposition to the wishes of Welles. Porter said that Lincoln seemed to be familiar with the name, character and reputation of every officer of rank in the army and navy, and "appeared to understand them better than some whose business it was to do so; he had many a good story to tell of nearly all, and if he could have lived to write the anecdotes of the war, I am sure he would have furnished the most readable book of the century".¹⁷

The Navy Department was conspicuously successful in selecting officers for the higher commands. Its good fortune in this respect as compared with the bad fortune of the War Department was committed upon by President Lincoln. He once said to Welles that the qualities of the officers of the navy must run more even, and the task of selecting officers for the higher commands must be less difficult, than in the army. The Secretary of the Navy assured the President that this was not true, and that the good fortune of the navy in choosing commanders had resulted from the wise judgment exercised by his department.¹⁸ It is a fact that the Navy Department did no experimenting corresponding with that of the War Department with McClellan, Halleck, Hooker and Pope. Before the end of 1862 the navy officers who achieved fame had already received the highest position within the gift of the President. Even at this early date the roll of great naval names could have been made out—Farragut, Porter, Foote, Davis, Dahlgren, Rodgers and Lee.

¹⁶ *Official Records*, first series, vol XXII., pp. 516, 518, 522, 523, 527, 549.

¹⁷ Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War*, p. 283.

¹⁸ Papers of Gideon Welles, in possession of Edgar T. Welles.

When Lincoln and Welles entered upon their duties in March, 1861, they found the Navy Department and the navy in a deplorable condition. Many of the clerks of the department were hostile to the new Secretary of the Navy. The disaffected naval officers on duty at the department maintained a rallying-point in the Bureau of Ordnance, whose chief, Captain George A. Magruder, and whose clerks, almost to a man, later allied themselves with the Confederacy. The Naval Observatory in Washington, under the command of Commander Matthew F. Maury, the famous meteorologist, and a warm friend of the South, was another centre for the propagation of Secessionist doctrines. The officers of the navy were more or less demoralized. Already a number of them had resigned, and many of those that remained in the service were suspected of disaffection to the Union. Captain Samuel Barron, one of the leaders of a clique of Southern officers, who were favorable to the interests of the Confederacy, was exercising a considerable influence on naval affairs. It was impossible for Welles to tell his friends from his foes. The Pensacola navy-yard was in the hands of the Confederates. The situation at the Norfolk yard was by no means reassuring, and among the officers of the Washington yard sentiments of disloyalty were common. All the navy-yards were in bad repair, since no appropriations for their improvement had been made in 1859 or 1860. The national treasury was bankrupt. In pursuance of President Buchanan's policy of non-resistance and temporizing, Secretary of the Navy Toucey had failed to place the navy in a posture of defense. As was customary in peace, most of the vessels in commission were on foreign stations. The home-squadron consisted of twelve ships, carrying one hundred and eighty-seven guns and about two thousand men.

A sharp turn in naval policy might have been expected to signalize the advent of the new administration. The public records, however, disclose no sudden change of any sort. For the first three weeks Welles did almost nothing to increase or improve the naval defense of the country, and for the second three weeks he did little. In the first days of April he prepared an expedition for the relief of Fort Sumter, and opened several rendezvous for the enlistment of seamen. Until the firing on Fort Sumter the policy of Lincoln differed but little from that of Buchanan. It was one of conciliation and waiting; it was passive, hesitant, expectant, uncertain, cautious and tentative. Lincoln and the members of his Cabinet were not familiar with federal administration, nor with each other; and at first they did not pull well together. They were strangely awkward at their new work, how awkward it is painful to tell. The

attempts of the Secretary of State to manage the government and the President are well known.

Seward's influence on naval affairs greatly added to the confusion of the first weeks of the new administration. On April 1, without consulting the Secretary of the Navy, he obtained Lincoln's signature to a most remarkable naval document. It was addressed to Welles. The body of the document was in the handwriting of Captain Montgomery C. Meigs, of the army; and the postscript in that of Lieutenant David D. Porter, of the navy. The body of the document was an order of Lincoln to Welles to make certain details of naval officers. Of special significance was the direction to Welles to detach Captain Silas H. Stringham from the Secretary's office, to order him to Pensacola, and to supersede him as detailing officer of the department by Captain Samuel Barron. The postscript, which related to the organization of the department, read as follows:

As it is very necessary at this time to have a perfect knowledge of the personal of the navy, and to be able to detail such officers for special purposes as the exigencies of the service may require, I request that you will instruct Captain Barron to proceed and organize the Bureau of Detail in the manner best adapted to meet the wants of the navy, taking cognizance of the discipline of the navy generally, detailing all officers for duty, taking charge of the recruiting of seamen, supervising charges made against officers, and all matters relating to duties which must be best understood by a sea officer. You will please afford Captain Barron any facility for accomplishing this duty, transferring to his department the clerical force heretofore used for the purposes specified. It is to be understood that this officer will act by authority of the Secretary of the Navy, who will exercise such supervision as he may deem necessary.¹⁹

These orders went far towards supplanting Welles as Secretary of the Navy by Barron. In the management of the department they made the naval officer the more important official. Upon receiving them, Welles was greatly astonished; and he immediately, on the night of April 1, carried them to the White House for an explanation. Lincoln was much surprised to find that he had signed a document of such import. He said that Seward, with two or three young men, had been at the White House during the day on a matter which the Secretary of State had much at heart; and that he had signed the document without reading it or knowing what it was, supposing that it related to an enterprise of Seward. Welles told the President that he had no confidence in the fidelity of Barron, who was by the order forced into an official and personal intimacy with him and who was virtually given charge of the department;

¹⁹ *The Galaxy*, vol. X. (1870), p. 624.

that the establishment of a bureau by executive order was unlawful; and that the proposition to make a naval officer secretary of the navy *de facto* was illegal and in his view "monstrous". Lincoln replied that he knew nothing of Barron, that the document was not his although he had signed it, and that Welles should treat it as cancelled. He expressed regret that he had blundered, and was wont afterwards to say that during the first weeks of his administration he and the members of his Cabinet were all new to their work and naturally made mistakes. Welles believed that the attempt of Seward and Porter to place the principal business of the department in the hands of Barron was a movement in behalf of the Confederacy and the Southern naval officers. Barron was shortly dismissed from the naval service. He entered the Confederate navy, taking rank as captain from March 26, 1861, five days before the date of the executive order giving him charge of the federal Navy Department.²⁰

Seward's interference with the department was not confined to measures for its reorganization and to the detailing of naval officers. He planned a naval expedition for the relief of Fort Pickens, Florida, which was officered and fitted out and had sailed before Welles got wind of it. This was the enterprise to which Lincoln supposed the above-mentioned document related when he signed it. On April 1 Seward had obtained Lincoln's signature to a second document, ordering Lieutenant Porter to proceed to the New York navy-yard and prepare an expedition for the relief of Fort Pickens. At this time Welles was fitting out at the New York navy-yard an expedition for the relief of Fort Sumter, which was to be under the command of Gustavus V. Fox. Both Welles and Seward intended that the ship *Powhatan* should sail as one of the vessels of their respective fleets. It therefore happened that the orders respecting her conflicted. The commandant of the New York yard was naturally confused. Since the President's orders were superior to those of the Secretary of the Navy, he gave Porter possession of the vessel. Welles was completely in the dark as to Porter's movements until about the time that Porter's fleet sailed from New York for Fort Pickens on April 6. On receiving intelligence of them, he in company with Seward, went to the White House and asked for an explanation of the diverting of the *Powhatan* from the Fort Sumter expedition, which venture, he said, would fail if this ship was taken from Fox's fleet. Lincoln, after explaining that he had confused the name of the *Powhatan* with that of another ship, decided that Porter should turn the vessel

²⁰ *The Galaxy*, vol. X. (1870), pp. 624-626.

over to Fox. An order to this effect was signed by Seward and sent to Porter at New York, but he had already sailed. A tug was procured, and the orders reached him before he got to sea. He however declined to detach the *Powhatan* from his fleet on the ground that he was acting under orders signed by the President, while the countermanding orders were signed by the President's subordinate, the Secretary of State. The *Powhatan* therefore proceeded to Fort Pickens. Welles and Fox always maintained that the sending of Porter's expedition was one of the main causes of the failure of Fox's.²¹

Porter cannot be freed from all blame for the part that he played in these strange proceedings. He was a man of mature years and long experience in the navy. The postscript of one of the documents was in his handwriting. Knowing well the routine of the department, he must have been aware of the irregularity of Seward's acts, and he must have foreseen that they would likely cause confusion. One might suppose that he had some knowledge of the character of Barron and of that officer's unfitness for the management of the navy during the crisis of the spring of 1861. On the other hand, it may be said in Porter's favor that he was acting under his superiors, the President and the Secretary of State, and that under the extraordinary circumstances that then existed irregularities were to be expected.²² When he accepted the command of the Fort Pickens expedition, he was under orders to proceed to the Pacific Coast and report for duty on the Coast Survey, a detail which he had sought. Welles did not forget the part that Porter played in Seward's machinations. That he did not permit it to prevent the advancement of that gallant and ambitious officer is a tribute to his fairness.

In retrospect, one can now see that during the first months of Lincoln's administration no matter deserved more consideration than the holding and defending of the Norfolk navy-yard, one of the three principal navy-yards of the United States. It contained numerous dwellings, sheds, storehouses and machine shops. Here were large quantities of tools, machines, naval stores and provisions, and some two thousand pieces of artillery. Connected with the yard was a commodious dry dock constructed of granite, and near it were twelve ships. One of these, the *Merrimac*, when equipped for sea, was worth \$1,200,000. The total value of the yard and its property was estimated by the department at \$9,780,000. The Nor-

²¹ *The Galaxy*, vol. X. (1870), pp. 627, 637; vol. XI. (1871), pp. 105-107; *Official Records*, first series, vol. IV., pp. 228-241.

²² *Soley, Admiral Porter*, pp. 101-102.

folk yard was strategically situated for the use of either the Unionists or the Confederates. To the latter, at the beginning of the war, its ordnance stores were worth far more than their value in money. These facts did not receive the consideration that they deserved. It is not here urged that the President should have provided for the defense of this yard without regard to his general policy, but certainly he should not have formulated his general policy without regard to its effect upon the holding of the yard.

During the first weeks of his administration Lincoln's policy was to do nothing that might offend those Southern states that still remained in the Union. He was especially considerate of the feelings of the Virginians. While some slight measures of defense were taken late in March and early in April, 1861, not until about the time that the Old Dominion seceded from the Union was any vigor and decision respecting the Norfolk yard shown by the administration. On April 16 Welles ordered Commodore Hiram Paulding to proceed from Washington to Norfolk and consult with the commandant of the yard, Captain C. S. McCauley, about its defense and the protection of its ships. Paulding carried an order to McCauley that rang with true mettle, the first issued by the department for several months of which this may be said. "The vessels and stores under your charge", the order read, "you will defend at any hazard, repelling by force, if necessary, any and all attempts to seize them, whether by mob violence, authorized effort, or any assumed authority." During the next four days the department showed considerable activity, but unfortunately its efforts were too late. McCauley and Paulding, who were in positions of authority, did not rise to the occasion. They were too old, too long schooled in routine, to accomplish great things in a sudden emergency. McCauley lacked energy and initiative, and he was largely under the influence of his disaffected officers, who were Southerners and who did their utmost to deceive him as to the real situation of the yard. On April 20, fearing an attack on the ships, he ordered them to be scuttled. They were sinking when Paulding arrived from Washington with fresh orders. The two officers now decided not to attempt a defense, but to destroy all the public property and to abandon the navy-yard. Their work of destruction, however, was hasty and ill-executed, and much property fell into the hands of the Confederates.

Possession of the Norfolk navy-yard with its valuable supplies was of great service to the South. Its cannon were used in fortifying the forts and batteries of the Confederacy on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and on the Potomac, York, James, Rappahannock, and Mississippi rivers. The *Merrimac* was raised and converted into a

terrible engine of war. Its dramatic contest with the *Monitor* made its name famous. The dry dock was but little injured. Many of the workshops with their valuable machinery escaped harm. Admiral Porter said that "but for the misfortune of losing, or we may say throwing away, the Norfolk Navy Yard, all the unarmed ports of the South would have easily fallen into our hands".²³

With no other naval officer was Lincoln so intimate as with Rear-Admiral John A. Dahlgren, who early in the war was commandant of the Washington navy-yard, and later was chief of the Bureau of Ordnance. For many years before the outbreak of the war Dahlgren had been in charge of the Ordnance Department of the Washington yard. He was the chief ordnance expert of the Old Navy, and had invented the Dahlgren gun. The friendship between him and the President was established during the first months of the war when the Washington navy-yard was the chief defense of the capital. In the latter part of April, 1861, almost all of the officers of this yard, including its commandant, Captain Franklin Buchanan, resigned from the navy, and most of them cast in their lot with the Confederacy. Dahlgren almost alone remained faithful to the flag, and he was given command of the yard. Later, when some of the higher officers of the navy wished to displace him and obtain his position, Lincoln refused them, saying that it should not be taken from Dahlgren, that he had held it when no one else would, and that he should keep it as long as he wished. During the first two years of the war the President visited the yard almost every week. He would take Dahlgren to ride with him, invite him to the White House to dine, and seek his advice upon naval matters. Often the two men were together during short voyages which Lincoln now and then made down the Potomac on one of the naval vessels. When the news reached Washington on Sunday morning, March 9, 1862, that the *Merrimac* had destroyed the *Cumberland* and the *Congress*, and that she might next move upon Washington or one of the Northern ports, the President was excited; he could not be satisfied with the opinions of Welles and other civilian advisers, but ordered his carriage and drove to the navy-yard to consult its commandant.²⁴

The diary of Dahlgren, for the years 1861-1863, is exceedingly interesting and valuable because of his close association with Lincoln during that period. From its pages one may glean much informa-

²³ *The Galaxy*, vol. X. (1870), pp. 112-119; *Senate Reports*, 37 Cong., 2 sess., no. 37, pp. 1-123; *Official Records*, first series, vol. IV., pp. 272-313; Sands, *From Reefer to Rear Admiral*, pp. 225-229; Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War*, p. 62; Parker, *Recollections of a Naval Officer*, pp. 206-207.

²⁴ Dahlgren, *Memoir of John A. Dahlgren*, p. 358.

tion regarding Lincoln's propensity for joking, the tragedy of his life during the war, his love of good reading, and his careless informality of manners. How the conflict between the States exhausted him and wore his heart away is painfully clear from such sentences as these: "Poor gentleman, how thin and wasted he is"; "I observe the President never jokes now"; "He looks thin and badly, and is very nervous"; "Mr. Lincoln frequently passed sleepless nights." Often, however, the President was in good spirits and would "let off a joke". On the trips down the Potomac he was usually jolly and full of anecdotes. Regarding one of these voyages Dahlgren writes: "Meanwhile we had a gay evening in the little cabin, and then went to bed. Five of us stowed away in a place like a box! The President in his usual way, and telling many a joke." Sometimes on these trips the President would read aloud to the assembled officers and officials some favorite piece of literature. He is said to have read with much dramatic power, and with much pathos or humor according to the character of the selection. His choice on one occasion was Halleck's spirited lyric, *Marco Bozzaris*, the closing lines of which have been thought prophetic of Lincoln's own career and fate:

"For thou are Freedom's now, and Fame's;
One of the few, the immortal names,
That were not born to die."²⁵

When the war began, Lincoln was entirely ignorant of military and naval affairs, but before its close he had acquired a considerable knowledge of them. He was especially interested in ordnance and ammunition. A resident of Washington tells me that he has seen the President in the White Lot firing at a target with a Spencer gun. The diary of Dahlgren contains many references to Lincoln in connection with naval ordnance. On one day he drives to the navy-yard with Assistant Secretary of the Navy Fox to see a 150-pounder fired off; shortly he comes down with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Treasury and examines "guns, iron plates, etc."; next, he goes to the Bureau of Ordnance "to see about some new powder". On January 29, 1863, Dahlgren records that the President sent for him. "Some man in trouble about arms. President holding a breech-loader in his hand." On February 16 Dahlgren is again sent for: "Some inflammable humbug had been poked at him; from it he went off easily to Charleston matters. Dupont and Fox differ as to plan of attack, and he insists on Fox going down to Charleston to talk it over." On April 28 Dahlgren

²⁵ Dahlgren, *Memoir of John A. Dahlgren*, pp. 364, 368.

writes thus: "The President came down in the afternoon, to learn about Ames, one of the hunters for a heavy ordnance contract. It is unfortunate that the President will meddle in such matters. No adventure on the Treasury now stands on its merits. Projects for new cannon, new powder, and devices of all kinds are backed by the highest influences."²⁸

Dahlgren's account of a visit to the White House on December 22, 1862, affords an excellent view of the variety and vexation of Lincoln's tasks:

The President sent for me about ten. Entering his cabinet room, Forney, Secretary of Senate, was in conversation with him, and saying that it would be well to publish report of committee on fight at Frederick, as the people were excited.

The President answered warmly, "that he did not want to swear, but why will people be such damned fools?" Forney remarked, going, "that he hoped the President would not let Mr. Chase resign", and added, "nor Mr. Seward". The President paused and reddened, then said suddenly, "If one goes, the other must; they must hunt in couples." So Forney made his bow.

The President, much glad to drop such troublesome business, and relaxing into his usual humor, sat down and said, "Well, Captain, here's a letter about a new powder", which he read, and showed the sample. Said he had burned some, and there was too much residuum. "Now, I'll show you." He got a small sheet of paper, placed on it some of the powder, ran to the fire, and with the tongs picked up a coal, which he blew, specs still on nose. It occurred to me how peaceful was his mind, so easily diverted from the great convulsion going on, and a nation menaced with disruption.

The President clapped the coal to the powder and away it went, he remarking, "There is too much left there." He handed me a small parcel of the powder to try, and, in noticing the late imbroglio, said, "it was very well to talk of remodelling the Cabinet, but the caucus had thought more of *their* plans than of *his* benefit", and he had told them so.²⁹

The President's interest in naval details was by no means confined to arms and ammunition. On September 15, 1861, Dahlgren writes: "Last night Professor Way took his electro-mercury light down the river, and I had the President out in a steamboat to see it." Several months later the same authority records that the President came down to the navy-yard to look at "some invention". Lincoln often inspected the vessels of the navy that visited Washington or Alexandria. Rear-Admiral Daniel Ammen relates that on one occasion when the President, in company with Dahlgren and Thurlow Weed, was passing Alexandria on board the *Philadelphia*, he happened to see our war-ship *Pawnee* abreast the wharf. On

²⁸ Dahlgren, *Memoir of John A. Dahlgren*, pp. 386, 388, 390-391.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 383-384.

hearing her name he asked if she were not the vessel with the "curious bottom having bilges coming down below the line of the keel, and then drew roughly on the marble top of a table, with a lead-pencil, a cross-section of the vessel, and asked Dahlgren whether the bottom was not something like that, and on receiving an affirmative answer he made one of the humorous comparisons for which he was famous".²⁸

Several naval officers who saw much of the President during the war have left us their impressions of him and their estimates of his character. Shortly after Lincoln's death, Dahlgren wrote: "I can say, from an intimate acquaintance with the President, that he was a man of rare sagacity, good genial temper, and desirable firmness; that he possessed qualities of the highest order as a ruler; indeed, we know of no man who was so well fitted to carry the country through her trial."²⁹

On several occasions Admiral Porter had good opportunities for observing the President. Early in 1865, a few weeks before the war ended, Lincoln spent several days with him on board of his flagship *Malvern*, on the James River. Porter was impressed with the kindness of heart, the habit of story-telling, and the unassuming simplicity of his distinguished visitor. Long after the war he wrote of Lincoln as follows:

To me, he was one of the most interesting men I ever met. He had an originality about him which was peculiarly his own, and one felt when with him as if he could confide his dearest secret to him with absolute security against its betrayal. There, it might be said, was "God's noblest work—an honest man", and such he was all through. I have not a particle of the bump of veneration on my head, but I saw more to admire in this man, more to reverence, than I had believed possible. He had a load to bear that few men could carry, yet he traveled on with it, footsore and weary, but without complaint; rather, on the contrary, cheering those who would faint on the roadside. He was not a demonstrative man, so no one will ever know amid all the trials he underwent how much he had to contend with and how often he was called upon to sacrifice his own opinions to those of others who he felt did not know as much about matters at issue as he did himself. When he did surrender, it was always with a pleasant manner, winding up with a characteristic story.³⁰

Rear-Admiral C. H. Davis was for the larger part of the war attached to the Navy Department, in Washington. He was an officer of cultivated mind and acute observation. His descriptions of the President are especially valuable since they were penned with-

²⁸ Dahlgren, *Memoir of John A. Dahlgren*, pp. 343, 378; Ammen, *The Old Navy and the New*, p. 341.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 509.

³⁰ Soley, *Admiral Porter*, pp. 445-446.

out view to their publication and before the Lincoln tradition had more or less obscured the real man. The following words, written on March 9, 1861, give Davis's first impressions:

Yesterday morning, Friday, I set off early for the department, in and about which I passed the day. I found that the officers of the navy were to be formally received by the Secretary and President, and being in uniform (though the others were in full dress), I fell in and had the pleasure of seeing the President and Mrs. Lincoln. In the former I was agreeably disappointed. His likenesses, such as are seen in prints, etc., give no idea of his appearance,—I might almost say, none whatever. His countenance is far from ugly, and its expression is decidedly attractive. The play of features and the easy smile are more engaging than the pictures make him. He is awkward in his figure and manners, but his awkwardness is not *gaucherie*. It is by no means vulgar. The impression he makes is altogether favorable.²¹

In a letter of December 13, 1863, apparently to his wife, Davis wrote the following prophetic words:

You may be assured that in future times Lincoln will be regarded as the very greatest of all the blessings bestowed on this country in these sad times,—as God-sent, appointed by God, like the prophets of old, to do his work, to save the nation and regenerate the people, to remove the curse of slavery, and to set another example of the profound wisdom that lies hidden and unrevealed in simplicity, truthfulness, uprightness before God, humility, conscientiousness, even when unaccompanied with great talents or great learning. In his and similar examples consists the political life of the nation and its safety,—the safety of our republican institutions.²²

CHARLES OSCAR PAULLIN.

²¹ Davis, *Life of Charles Henry Davis*, pp. 114-115.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 301.